

Charles D. Baker
Governor

Karyn Polito
Lieutenant Governor



Marylou Sudders
Secretary

Amy Kershaw
Commissioner

Annual Department of Transitional Assistance Organizational Report

January 2022



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JANUARY 2022

OVERVIEW

Section 10 of Chapter 18 of the Massachusetts General Laws requires the Department of Transitional Assistance (DTA) to submit a report annually that contains a description of the organization of the department and a review of the work of the agency.

AGENCY MISSION

DTA's mission is to assist and empower low-income individuals and families to meet their basic needs, improve their quality of life, and achieve long-term economic self-sufficiency. DTA offers a comprehensive system of programs and supports to help individuals and families achieve greater economic self-sufficiency, including food and nutritional assistance, economic assistance, and employment supports.

PROGRAMS ADMINISTERED

DTA administers four primary programs that receive both state and federal funding, which aim to meet the agency's mission. In addition to administering these programs, DTA provides rigorous oversight and special attention to eligibility standards and compliance for each program. DTA uses advanced analytics and a variety of fraud detection practices to promote programmatic integrity.

SUPPLEMENTAL NUTRITION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (SNAP)

SNAP benefits help families supplement their food budgets to afford nutritious food. Residents of the Commonwealth who participate in SNAP include families with children, elders, and persons with disabilities. While administered by DTA, SNAP benefits are 100% federally funded and regulated. The Commonwealth is responsible for 50% of the costs to administer the program.

Beyond the core responsibilities in administering the SNAP program, DTA works alongside a variety of partners contributing to the mission of food security in the Commonwealth.

TRANSITIONAL AID TO FAMILIES WITH DEPENDENT CHILDREN (TAFDC)

TAFDC is a state and federally funded program that provides financial assistance and employment programming to families with children, and pregnant women, with little or no income. TAFDC is operated under the federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant. Participants receive child care and transportation assistance to support their engagement in education, training, or other employment related activities. Certain TAFDC participants are required to perform a work-related activity as a condition of eligibility.

EMERGENCY AID TO THE ELDERLY, DISABLED, AND CHILDREN (EAEDC)

EAEDC is a state funded program, which provides financial assistance to certain adults who are elderly or disabled, as well as children. Those eligible for EAEDC include people over 65 who are waiting for Supplemental Security Income payments to begin, individuals unable to work due to a physical or mental incapacity, and individuals who are participating in a Massachusetts Rehabilitation Commission program.

SUPPLEMENTAL SECURITY INCOME (SSI) AND STATE SUPPLEMENTAL PAYMENTS (SSP)

The SSI program is a federal program that provides cash assistance to the elderly, disabled, and blind. Massachusetts provides optional state-funded supplemental payments designed to supplement these funds. DTA funds SSP for elderly, disabled, and blind recipients. Currently, the University of Massachusetts Medical School administers SSP payments for DTA.

AGENCY STAFFING

As of October 2021, DTA employs approximately 1,583 employees across the Commonwealth in the areas of programs, policy, and management. DTA staff have a range of responsibilities from benefit eligibility, employment and training assistance, program integrity, legal, finance, policy development, and fair hearings. 1,265 DTA employees, or more than 80% of the department's active employees, are deployed in one of our 20 local transitional assistance offices across the Commonwealth.

Currently, the Department's SNAP workforce, serving the largest caseload of the agency's primary programs, consists of 676 employees, including 539 caseworkers and 137 supervisors.

The Department's economic assistance workforce includes 311 DTA staff members serving clients who receive TAFDC and EAEDC. This includes 165 TAFDC caseworkers, 61 EAEDC caseworkers, and 85 supervisors, all of whom provide direct case management.

In addition to DTA's case management workforce, our local transitional assistance offices are staffed by 278 employees who serve in managerial roles, provide administrative assistance, or offer intensive, targeted client supports.

While current staffing numbers are below the average historical staffing level, the Department is in the process of hiring positions across all programs including SNAP case workers, TAFDC case workers, EAEDC caseworkers, Self Sufficiency Specialists and Full Engagement Workers. As part of the agency's diversity, equity, and inclusion work, DTA has been actively recruiting diverse candidates to fill vacancies in both management and front-line roles to ensure the agency reflects the families and communities the Department serves across Massachusetts. The agency's efforts have included implementing revised hiring practices, launching an agency-wide mentorship program, and supporting the creation of employee-led affinity groups, known as employee resource groups (ERGs), to identify and support professional development and career advancement opportunities for specific employee populations.

ORGANIZATION OF DTA

DTA is organized into 20 local transitional assistance offices and one central office. Transitional assistance offices are responsible for providing direct services to clients and those seeking assistance throughout the Commonwealth. The agency's central office houses the Office of the Commissioner, senior management, program integrity, legal, finance and other administrative units.

Included in this report is an organizational chart of DTA's Central Office and a leadership chart of the Department's 20 local transitional assistance offices.

DTA OPERATIONAL UPDATE

In June 2021, DTA reopened its local offices throughout the Commonwealth for in-person services following an extended closure in response to the COVID-19 public health emergency. In each office, visitors can use self-service tools, including DTA Connect-enabled kiosks, to apply for benefits, update case information, and access or submit documents and verifications. Additionally, DTA staff and interpreters are available at each office to provide people with a high-level of customer service during their visit, guide them through available self-service options and the DTA Connect platform to do business with the agency 24/7 from their home, or connect them with caseworkers on DTA's Assistance Line for more in-depth support.

In response to the public health emergency, DTA quickly expanded and strengthened its online and telephonic access points, which has enabled families with reliable phone or internet access to conduct virtually all of their business with the agency without having to visit an office using DTACONNECT.com, the DTA Connect mobile app, and the DTA Assistance Line.

The Department rolled out key technology upgrades to streamline client experience and benefit processing, including:

- Telephonic signature to decrease processing times of applications and recertifications;
- Proactive text messaging and emailing to provide up-to-date case information for applicants and clients;
- Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology to accelerate document processing; and,
- New self-service features on the DTA Assistance Line in up to 6 languages.

DTA continues to leverage these technological enhancements in conjunction with continued federal flexibilities and increased federal pandemic-related supports to maintain a high level of customer service for families and promote economic stability as families look to recover from the economic impacts of the pandemic.

These tools have enabled the Department to respond to fluctuating caseloads in the last year as families navigate shifting pandemic-related federal supports. As the programs and policies changed over time, DTA experienced temporary surges in applications for all of its programming, most recently in September 2021 when federal pandemic unemployment payments expired. As a result, today's SNAP caseload is currently above 570,000 households, representing a 27% increase above the pre-pandemic average of 450,000 households. The Department's TAFDC and EAEDC caseloads have also seen recent increases, and currently stand at approximately 29,000 and 21,000 respectively.

While DTA offices are open across the state for in-person services, the vast majority of DTA clients are continuing to choose to do business with the Department through its enhanced online and telephonic platforms. In the first four months of DTA's office reopening, in person visits are down approximately 85% from the same time period pre-covid.

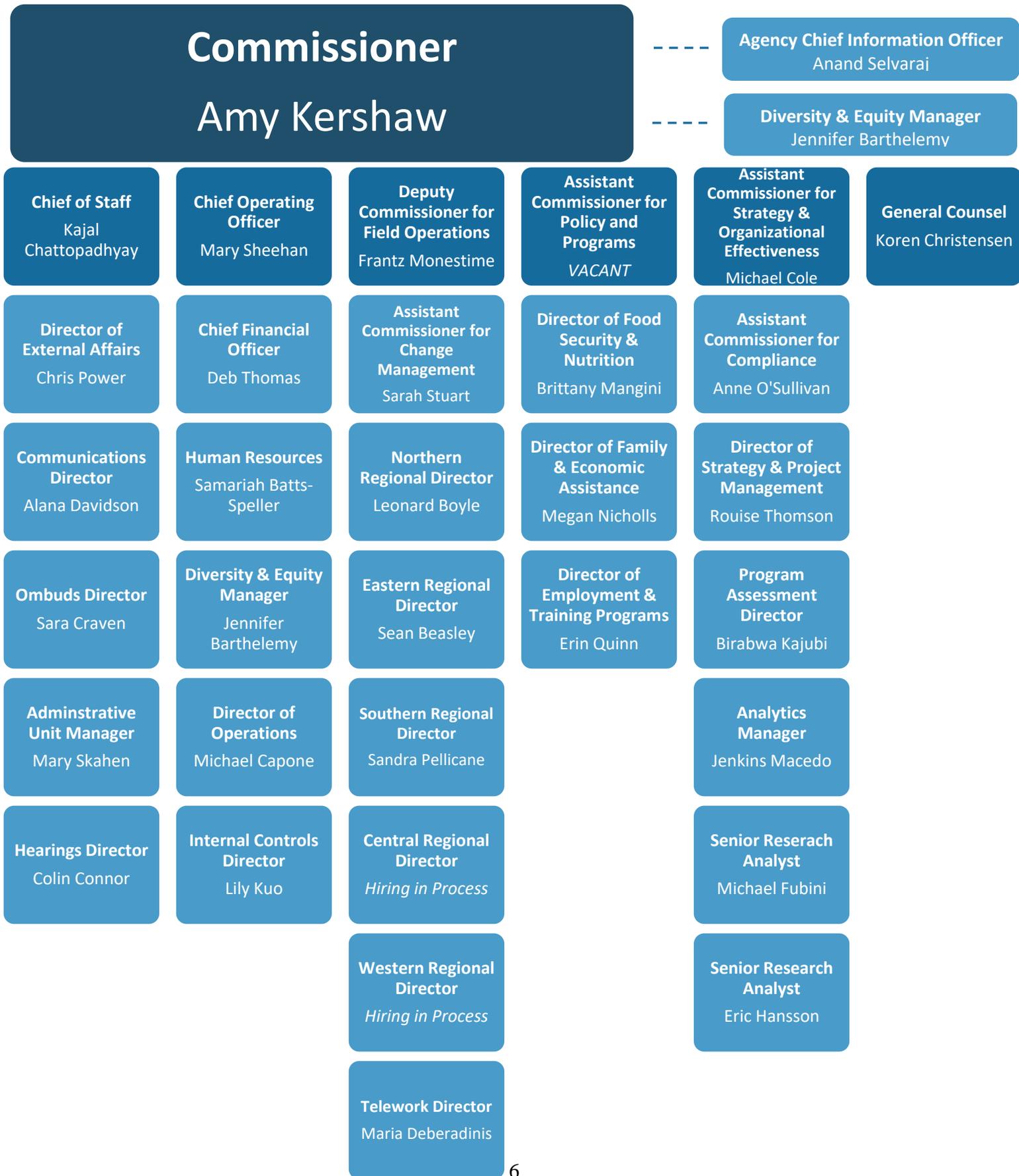
Families receiving SNAP benefits continue to receive additional federal SNAP supplemental payments, initially authorized by the Families First Coronavirus Response Act, each month to bring families' benefits up to at least the maximum monthly amount for their household size. Throughout the 2020-2021 school year, the Pandemic EBT (P-EBT) program provided additional direct food assistance to the families of more than 500,000 children. In total, the program delivered upwards of \$250 million to families, which, in turn, made its way to our state and local economies. To support families receiving TAFDC, the Department also secured federal funding to provide additional, one-time supports in August 2021.

DTA also played a key role in the Baker-Polito Administration's Food Security Task Force, which was convened in April 2020 by the COVID-19 Command Center. The Task Force was comprised of a broad group of public and private members charged with ensuring food insecurity and food supply needs were addressed during the COVID-19 public health emergency. Through the work of the Task Force, the Administration invested nearly \$100 million in efforts to promote food security and strengthen the state's food system, including more than \$50 million for the Food Security Infrastructure Grant program, a \$5 million investment in the Healthy Incentives Program to strategically partner with 39 farms and farm vendors to increase accessibility, and \$9 million to support the state's food banks.

In alignment with the Administration's emphasis on economic recovery, DTA launched the next phase of its redesigned employment and training programming, DTA Pathways to Work. This phase includes the roll out of streamlined processes, simplified policies, and new tools and strategies to engage with families. The goal of the program redesign is to provide meaningful, tailored opportunities for families, offering participants more time and resources to invest in their career and economic mobility goals. DTA's economic assistance case workers and employment specialists are engaging with Pathways to Work eligible families in this new process, connecting participants with opportunities that best match individual and family goals, and supporting clients as they position themselves to succeed as the Commonwealth's economy emerges from the - pandemic's impact.

DTA is committed to providing the individuals and families we serve with safe, reliable, and equitable access to all of the Department's critical supports and services. DTA also prioritizes a high level of customer service in local offices and through its remote access points. The pandemic has undoubtedly had lasting effects on the way people do business with the Department. In the months ahead, DTA will continue to assess client need in order to respond flexibly and with tools and services that enable families to do business with the Department at a time and in a manner that works best for them.

DTA ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



TRANSITIONAL ASSISTANCE OFFICE LEADERSHIP CHART

Central Region	Eastern Region	Northern Region	Southern Region	Western Region
Fitchburg Center Jennifer Tait	Brockton Sarah Maloney	Chelsea Center Lucia Tramontozzi	Fall River Melissa Zeitz	Greenfield Zoy Soulis
Framingham Lina Stolnik- Yoffe	Nubian Square Kristen Webster	Lawrence Elaine DeVito	Hyannis Wendy Buttrick <i>Acting</i>	Holyoke Joanne Lacour
Southbridge Joyce Clemence	Newmarket Square Diane Deban	Lowell Adrienne Anderson-Floyd	New Bedford Nelson Abreu	Pittsfield Deni Evans
Worcester Lori Jacques- Basiner	Quincy Erin Donnelly	Malden Martine Cesar	Taunton Nancy Amaral <i>Acting</i>	Springfield Center Melissa Pietraszkiwicz
		North Shore Sylvia Hosman		